

CATS Report

Cats and Their Stats Northern Ireland 2025



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Methodology

For the sixth year, we have commissioned an external and independent agency, Basis Research, to conduct the research contained in the *CATS Report Northern Ireland 2025*.

An online survey was used to collect information among a nationally representative audience of adults over the age of 18 in Northern Ireland, allowing us to estimate the proportion of cat owners in the home nation. We also conducted a more detailed survey among cat owners. This was carried out between 25 February 2025 and 26 April 2025. ‘In the last 12 months’ within the report refers to the time period March 2024 to March 2025 and unless otherwise stated, comparative data in this survey uses data from the *CATS Report Northern Ireland 2024*.

The research consisted of a UK nationally representative sample of 3,521 individuals and a boost of 6,322 cat owners, including regional boosts to ensure accurate representation in these areas. Overall, 10,626 people participated in the study, including 190 cat owners in Northern Ireland.

Data presentation

We work with Basis Research to calculate estimates of the cat population annually. Three data sources are used in this calculation:

- nationally representative online survey panel to determine the percentage of UK households who own a cat (n=3,521)
- data from the survey of cat owners on the number of cats owned by each household
- data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the number of households

Percentages throughout the report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to rounding, there will be instances in the report where percentage calculations do not total 100%. Other figures, such as the estimated numbers of cats in the population, are rounded to two significant figures. When calculating cat estimates, we have taken the total estimated cat population figure and multiplied it by the whole percentage, for example 15% of all cats are not registered with a vet, equating to 1.5 million cats. Statistics and population calculations are estimates based on owner-reported responses to the online survey.

Significance testing is undertaken on the data at 99% and 95% confidence intervals. When a finding is referenced as significant within the report it has found to be significant at a 95% confidence interval.

Cat acquisition: Throughout this report we look at recency of cat acquisition, typically looking at all those cats acquired in the last 12 months compared to another time period, for example over a year ago. The data is sourced from the question ‘When did you acquire your cat?’ in the CATS 2025 Research Survey.

Nationally representative sample: The population of interest is the entire population of the UK. The nationally representative sample reflected its structure including gender, age, socio-economic groupings and regions.

More information available upon request from stats@cats.org.uk

Welcome to the 2025 Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Report Northern Ireland

We're delighted to present the sixth edition of the *Cats and Their Stats (CATS) Report Northern Ireland*, the largest annual survey dedicated to understanding the lives of cats and the people who care for them in Northern Ireland. This year's findings offer a fascinating snapshot of how cat ownership is evolving, reflecting shifting attitudes, behaviours and societal trends.

As the UK's leading cat welfare charity, Cats Protection relies on this data to stay ahead of emerging issues and ensure we're doing the very best for cats and their owners. The insights also help us understand the perspectives of those who don't currently own cats, allowing us to shape more inclusive and impactful messaging.

This year's report reveals several notable trends. We're seeing a rise in cat ownership among younger, more affluent individuals, alongside growing interest in pedigree breeds. More cats are being purchased rather than adopted, placing increased pressure on the rehoming sector, which more often than not continues to work at high capacity to support cats in need.

Social media is playing a bigger role in shaping how younger owners think about and care for their cats. While some social media content featuring cats can be harmful, it also presents a powerful opportunity to share positive welfare messages. By promoting content that

respects and champions cat welfare, we can harness the reach of these platforms to support better understanding and treatment of cats everywhere.

Access to veterinary services remains a concern, with barriers slightly increasing over the past year. Interestingly, cost is less frequently cited as a barrier to visiting the vet. This likely reflects the overall trend towards a more affluent cat owner demographic and raises an important question: could it be that some less affluent owners now feel unable to afford cat ownership altogether? With so many unwanted cats in need of homes, we must continue to offer support to those less able to afford cat ownership.

At Cats Protection, we remain committed to working with owners, breeders and veterinary professionals to tackle these challenges and improve the welfare of cats across the UK.

Kit Sturgess VetMB, PhD, DSAM, FRCVS
Chair of Trustees, Cats Protection



Key findings

State of the nation

- There are 250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland; the same as last year
- The age split of cat owners in Northern Ireland has moved away from older age groups; cat owners in Northern Ireland tend to be younger than the general population of Northern Ireland
- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female than male

The cat market

- Pedigrees now represent 30% of the total cat population in Northern Ireland; an increase from last year
- The popularity of buying cats has increased faster in Northern Ireland than all other devolved nations, with bought cats now representing 30% of all cats in Northern Ireland (15% in 2024)
- The gap between purchase and adoption is wider for cats in Northern Ireland acquired in the last 12 months, compared to the entire cat population in Northern Ireland

Veterinary care

- Neutering numbers have fallen in Northern Ireland to 80%
- Microchipping numbers have dropped in Northern Ireland to 60%. Compared to the UK as a whole (13%), significantly more owners in Northern Ireland have simply not thought about microchipping their cat
- Insurance and vaccination numbers have increased in Northern Ireland but still lag behind the UK as a whole

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are researching the needs of their cats more, both before and after acquisition
- While owners in Northern Ireland still primarily turn to their vet for advice, this percentage has dropped to 56%
- Northern Ireland has the lowest rate of indoor-only cats of all the UK nations at just 28%

Companionship

- Companionship is still the leading reason that people in Northern Ireland choose to own a cat

Download a sharable PDF of this page at bit.ly/NI-KeyFindings2025

State of the nation

Cat population

22% of households in Northern Ireland own a cat.



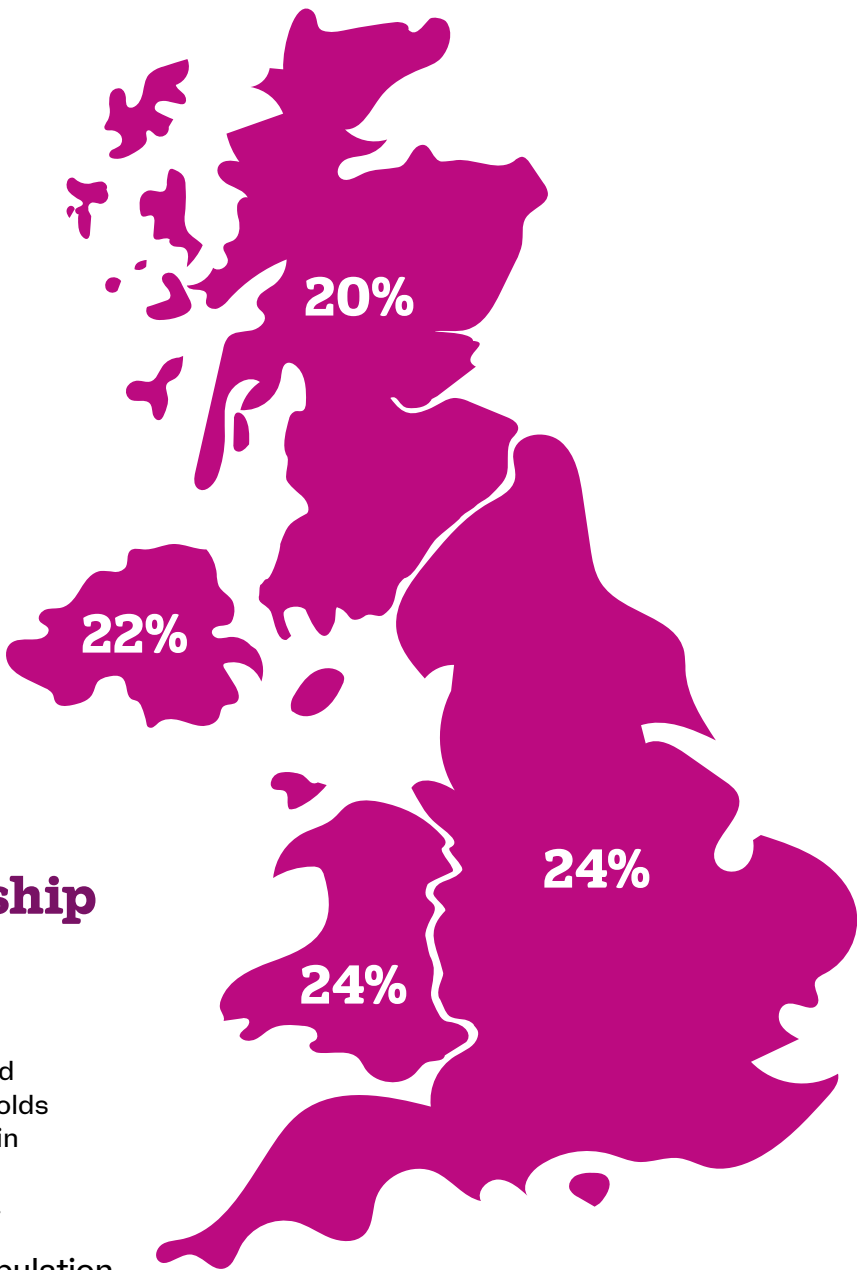
There are **250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland** (250,000 in 2024).

The average number of cats per cat-owning household in Northern Ireland is 1.5 cats (1.7 in 2024), with 67% of households having one cat and 32% owning two or more cats.

Household cat ownership across the UK

Cat ownership levels vary across the UK, ranging from 20% of households in Scotland owning one or more cats, to 22% of households in Northern Ireland and 24% of households in England and Wales, with no statistically significant changes from last year's figures.

The distribution of the owned cat population remains largely the same across the UK*.



	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
Total UK	10.6	10.2	25%	24%
England	9.0	8.5	25%	24%
Wales	0.5	0.5	24%	24%
Scotland	0.8	0.7	22%	20%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.2	21%	22%

*Source: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds

Profile of cat owners

The age split of cat owners in Northern Ireland has moved away from older age groups.

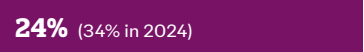
18 to 34-year-olds



35 to 54-year-olds



55+



Those under 35 years old are still much more likely to have recently acquired a cat.

Northern Irish adults All Northern Irish cat owners

Northern Irish cat owners who acquired a cat in the last 12 months

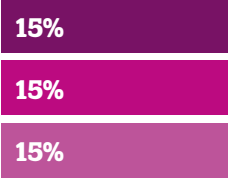
18 to 24-year-olds



25 to 34-year-olds



35 to 44-year-olds



45 to 54-year-olds



55 to 64-year-olds

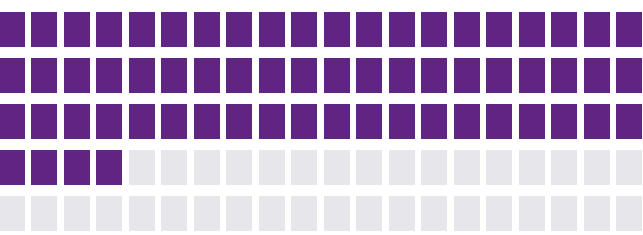


65+ year-olds



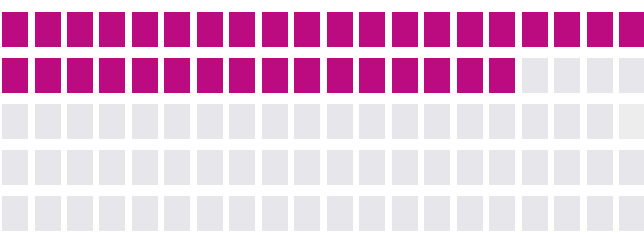
Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to be female.

64% of Northern Irish cat owners are female



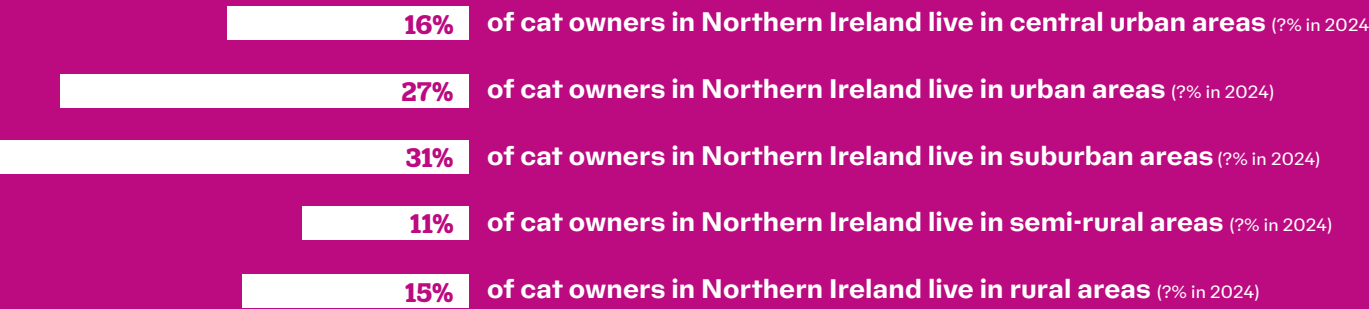
Wales: 65%, Scotland: 57%

36% of Northern Irish cat owners are male



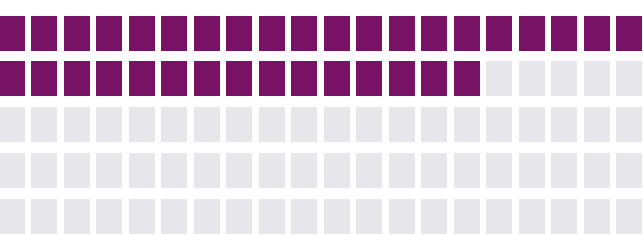
Wales: 34%, Scotland: 43%

Where cats live in Northern Ireland remains largely consistent with last year.

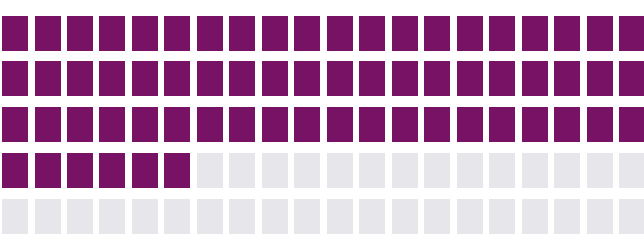


Most Northern Irish cat owners own their own home.

35% live in rented accommodation



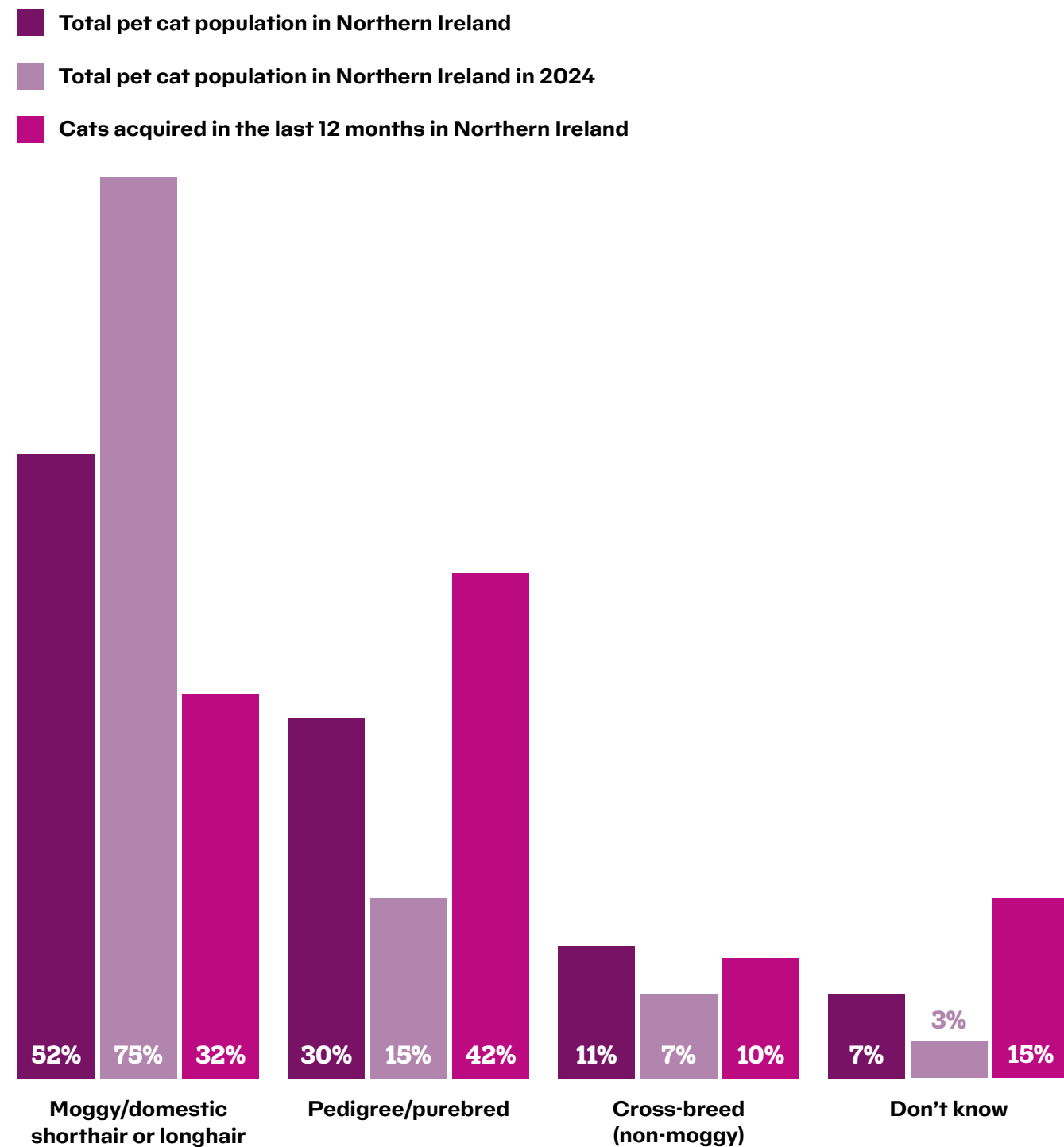
66% are homeowners



The cat market

What type of cats do people have?

The proportion of pedigrees in the Northern Ireland cat population has increased since last year.



The growth in the popularity of pedigree cats across the UK (36%, up from 23% in 2021) is echoed in Northern Ireland, with cats acquired in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months more likely to be pedigree.

“There isn’t a typical way owners take on a new cat in Northern Ireland. Cats Protection welcomes the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs’ aim to deliver a version of Lucy’s Law which bans the third-party sale of kittens. The Department’s proposals to require anyone who wishes to sell, give away or otherwise transfer ownership of a kitten to register with their local council reflects the diverse makeup of the cat market and the many ways cat owners acquire their cats in Northern Ireland.

“For the first time, cat owners in Northern Ireland are starting to follow the UK cat market’s trend towards pedigree cats and more cats are being bought than any other method of acquisition. Cat breeding is not regulated, so there is little protection against cats being overbred and kittens being born in poor conditions, leading to sick or diseased kittens. There are also concerns around the emergence of cats that are bred with extreme characteristics and wildcat hybrids. Sadly, some breeds are being bred with cute but harmful features, putting the appearance of the cat over their health and welfare. Often, this can also lead to a lifetime of suffering for the cat as well as high, unexpected vet bills for owners. Although the Department’s proposals will improve traceability in the cat market, we believe more needs to be done to protect the welfare of cats in Northern Ireland. We are calling for cat breeding to be regulated to safeguard kittens and cats used for breeding.”

Madison Rogers, Associate Director of Advocacy, Campaigns & External Affairs, Cats Protection



Pedigree versus purebred

Purebred: a specific breed of cat produced through selective breeding, and both parents are of the same breed.

Cross-breed: a breed of cat produced through breeding with different breeds, for example two different purebreds or a purebred and a non-purebred/moggy cat.

Pedigree: a purebred or cross-breed cat that is registered with a governing body, and the ancestry is recorded.

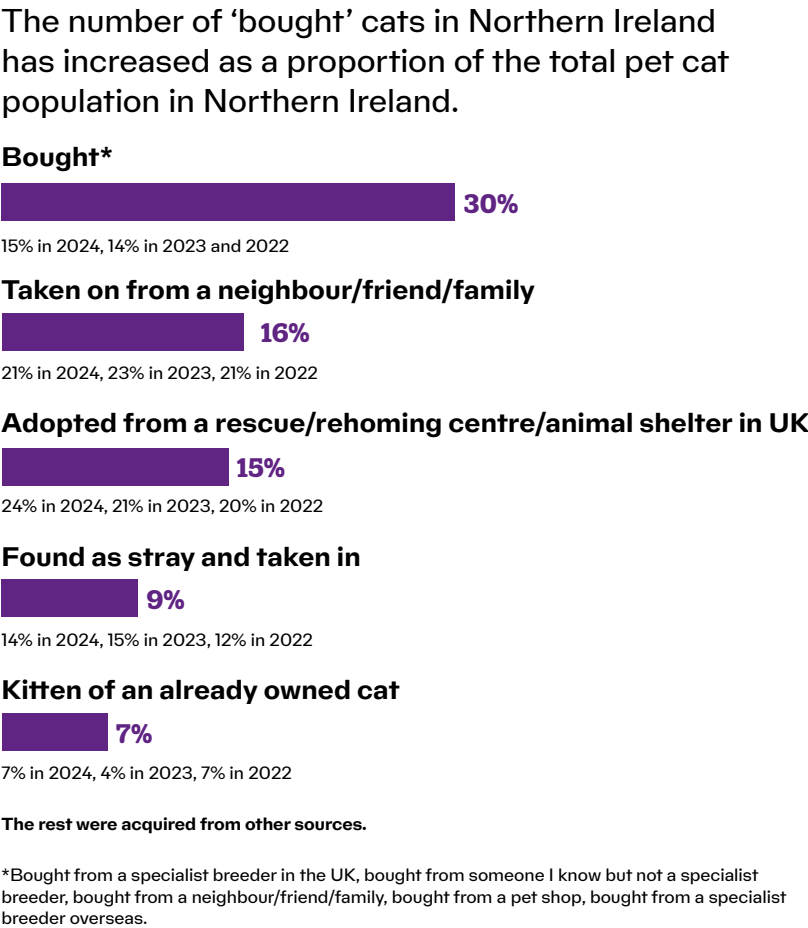
Moggy: a breed of cat that is usually produced through non-selective breeding and is neither a purebred, nor a cross-breed.

In this report, pedigree and purebred cats are included in the description of ‘pedigree’, with purebred cats referred to as ‘pedigree without paperwork’, where relevant.

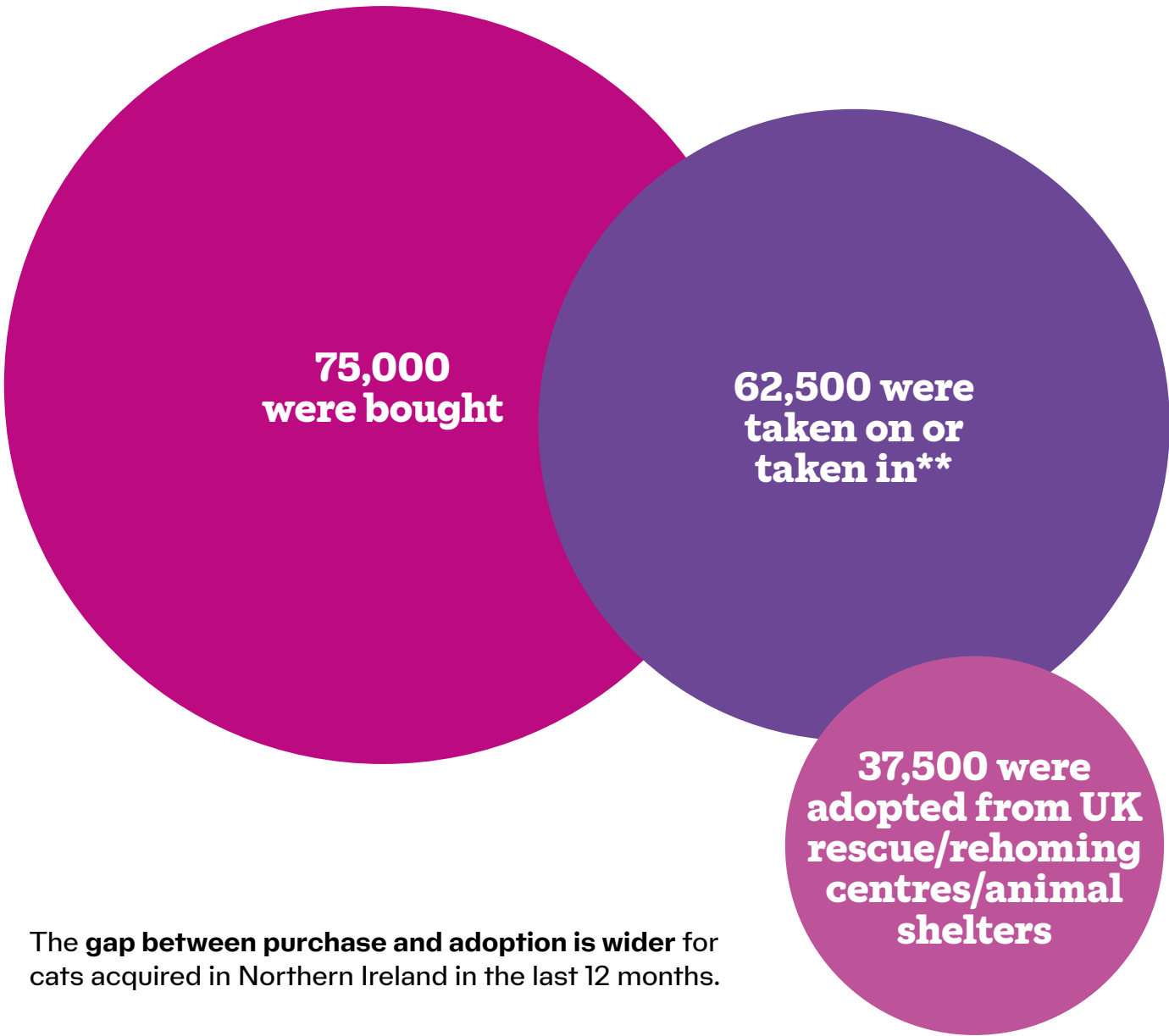


How cats are acquired

21% of the total current cat population in Northern Ireland was acquired during the last 12 months, equating to 53,000 cats.



This equates to a current pet cat population in Northern Ireland where around:



The gap between purchase and adoption is wider for cats acquired in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months.



The number of bought cats in Northern Ireland is less than the UK as a whole (38%) but higher in Northern Ireland for cats acquired in the last 12 months (UK: 44%).

Cats are less likely to be adopted in Northern Ireland, compared to the other UK nations:



**Taken on from a neighbour/friend/family or found as a stray and taken in.

Veterinary care

Veterinary capacity

30% of Northern Irish owners say that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet in the last 12 months.

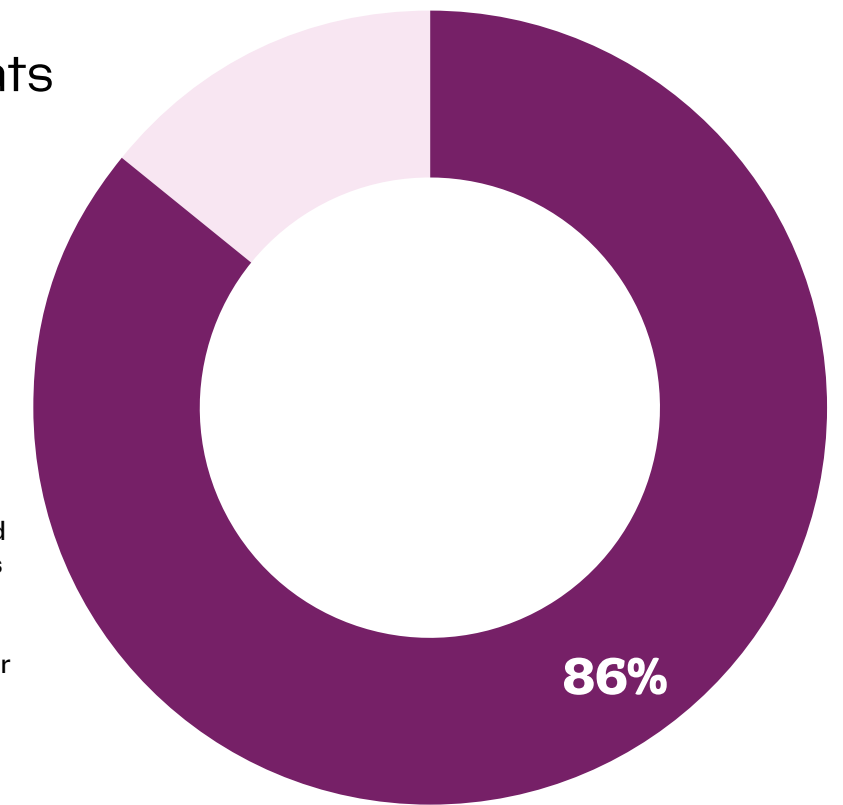
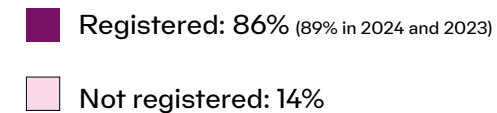
15% in 2024, 22% in 2023, 27% in 2022

It may be that the apparent easing of veterinary access seen last year in Northern Ireland was a temporary increase in an otherwise stable pattern of challenging veterinary access. Problems accessing a vet are reportedly more common for those aged 18 to 34 (36%). These individuals are perhaps more likely to be unavailable during the working day when vets are open.



Vet registration

The proportion of cats in Northern Ireland who are registered with a vet is **86%**.



Around 35,000 cats in Northern Ireland are not registered with a vet. Some cats and their owners will be at a greater likelihood of requiring veterinary help. For example, outdoor cats are at greater risk of injury due to their lifestyle, and first-time owners may require more health advice. Every effort must be made to support access to veterinary care for these groups.

Vet visits

53% of owners in Northern Ireland take their cat to the vet routinely every year, the lowest of all the UK nations.

Regular vet visits are important to spot disease early and ensure that cats receive preventative care. Early intervention is often not only better for the cat, but also their owner, as the cost of veterinary care goes up when cats present with advanced disease or long-established health problems that could have been caught sooner.

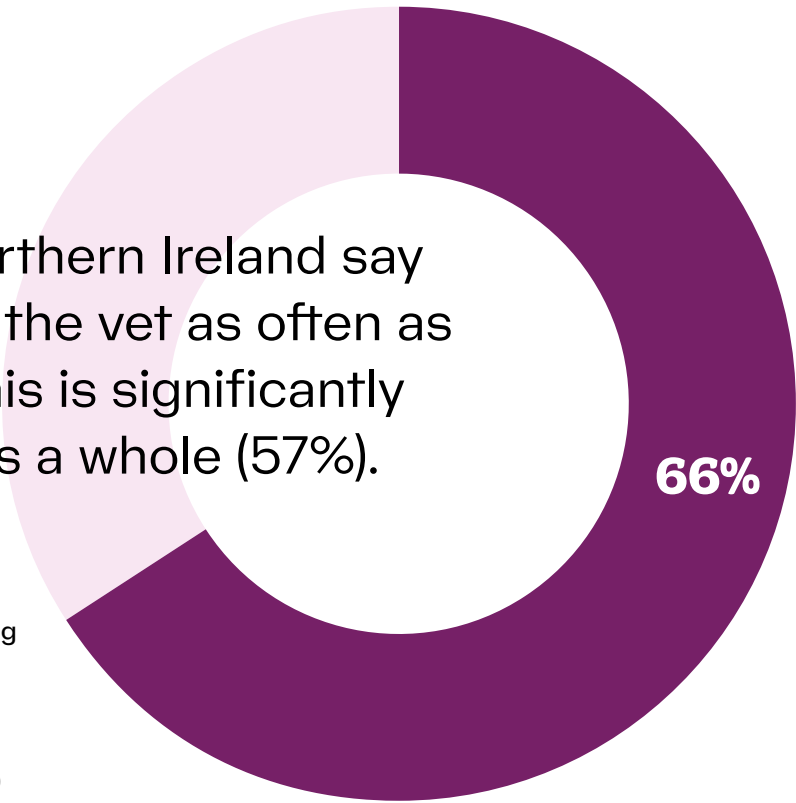
66% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like to. This is significantly higher than the UK as a whole (57%).

The stress of a vet visit is the top reason for owners in Northern Ireland not visiting the vet as much as they would like.

Too stressful for me/my cat*:



The cost

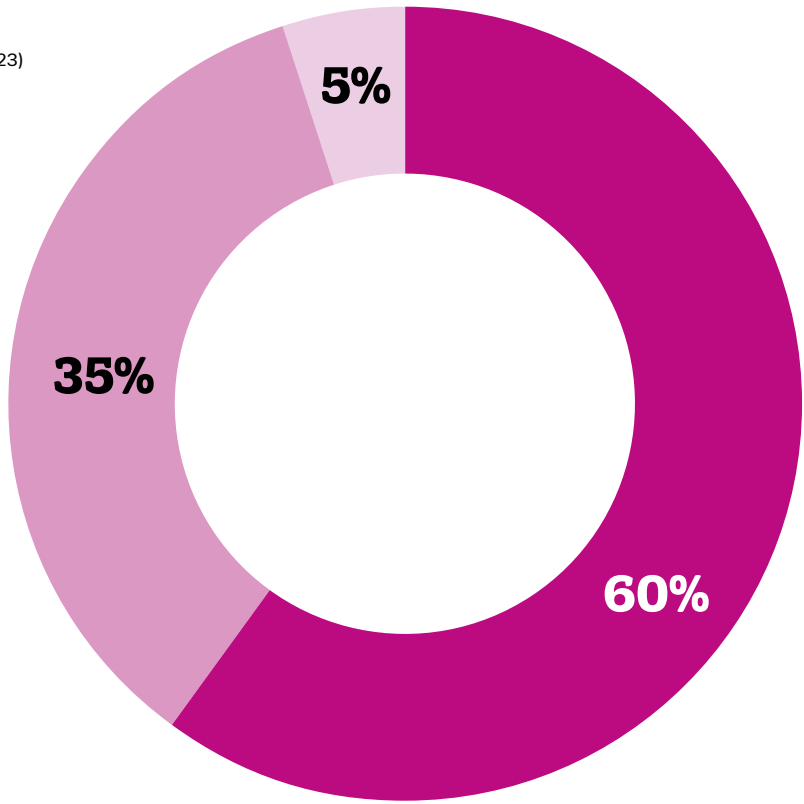
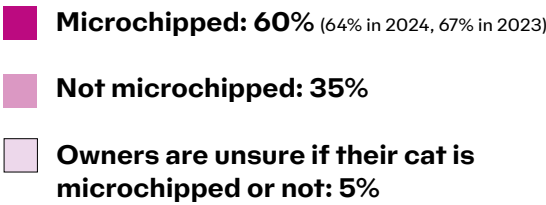


Although the stress of a vet visit is a greater barrier to visiting the vet than cost, this may be indicative of the shift towards more affluent owners, rather than vets becoming more affordable. Mobile vet clinics are increasing in number and popularity and may be a way to address some of these access issues. It is also encouraging to see the pharmaceutical industry proactively producing more ‘easy to give’ medications for cats, which may contribute to lowering the stress barrier of cats accessing veterinary care.

*Net of responses related to these themes.

Microchipping

The proportion of cats with a microchip has dropped again in Northern Ireland to 60%.



The cats less likely to be microchipped

Around 100,000 cats in Northern Ireland are still potentially without a microchip, reducing their chances of being reunited with their owners, should they get lost or stolen. In a departure from other UK nations, cat owners in Northern Ireland who have had cats most of their adult life are less likely to have their cat microchipped (43%). Uninsured cats in Northern Ireland are also less likely to be microchipped (48%), as well as those living in rural areas (47%) and rented accommodation (51%).

The main reasons cat owners in Northern Ireland are choosing not to get their cat microchipped relate to perceived need.

My cat doesn't stray/go far



I just hadn't thought about microchipping my cat



My cat doesn't go outside



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Compared to the UK as a whole (13%), significantly more owners in Northern Ireland have simply not thought about microchipping their cat. This provides a great opportunity for vets to proactively bring it up with their cat-owning clients.

Many owners/vets opt to microchip cats when neutering them. With neutering numbers falling, this may have a knock-on effect of also lowering microchipping numbers. For this reason, it is recommended that vets encourage microchipping as early as possible, either at vaccination or before the cat leaves their breeder.

The responsibility to ensure a pet’s microchip is registered and kept up to date sits primarily with the pet owners. Breeders, shelters and sellers should ensure a chip is registered to the new owner or provide transfer instructions. Veterinary practices are not legally responsible for registration, but many vets will remind owners to register/update details.

“It is very disappointing to see microchipping numbers fall for a third year in a row. We welcome Minister Muir examining the case for mandatory microchipping of cats, and hope this will lead to the swift introduction of compulsory microchipping of pet cats. New regulations would help reunite owners with their lost pets and support the rehoming sector, which is over capacity with long waitlists. Our pens are continuously filled with stray cats who are not microchipped. Trying to find these cats’ owners puts a burden on our team and takes up space in our pens for cats that need us the most. If their owners cannot be found, then the cats are needlessly rehomed, leaving their loving family unaware of what has happened to their beloved cat. Sadly, many of the cats that come into our maternity ward are pregnant strays without a microchip. There is also an added pressure of birthing, feeding, and getting mum and kittens ready to find new homes.

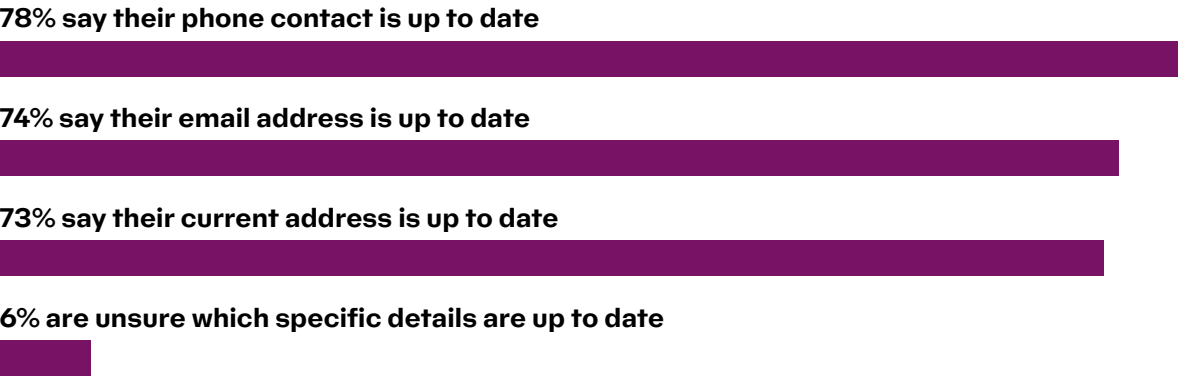
“Northern Ireland consistently has the lowest microchipping numbers in the UK. Many cat owners are not proactively microchipping their pets, so Cats Protection is calling for the introduction of compulsory microchipping to encourage owners to microchip their cats.”

Andrew Doherty, Manager, Northern Ireland Cat Centre, Cats Protection



Microchips and keeping details up to date

87% of cats with a microchip in Northern Ireland have up-to-date details.

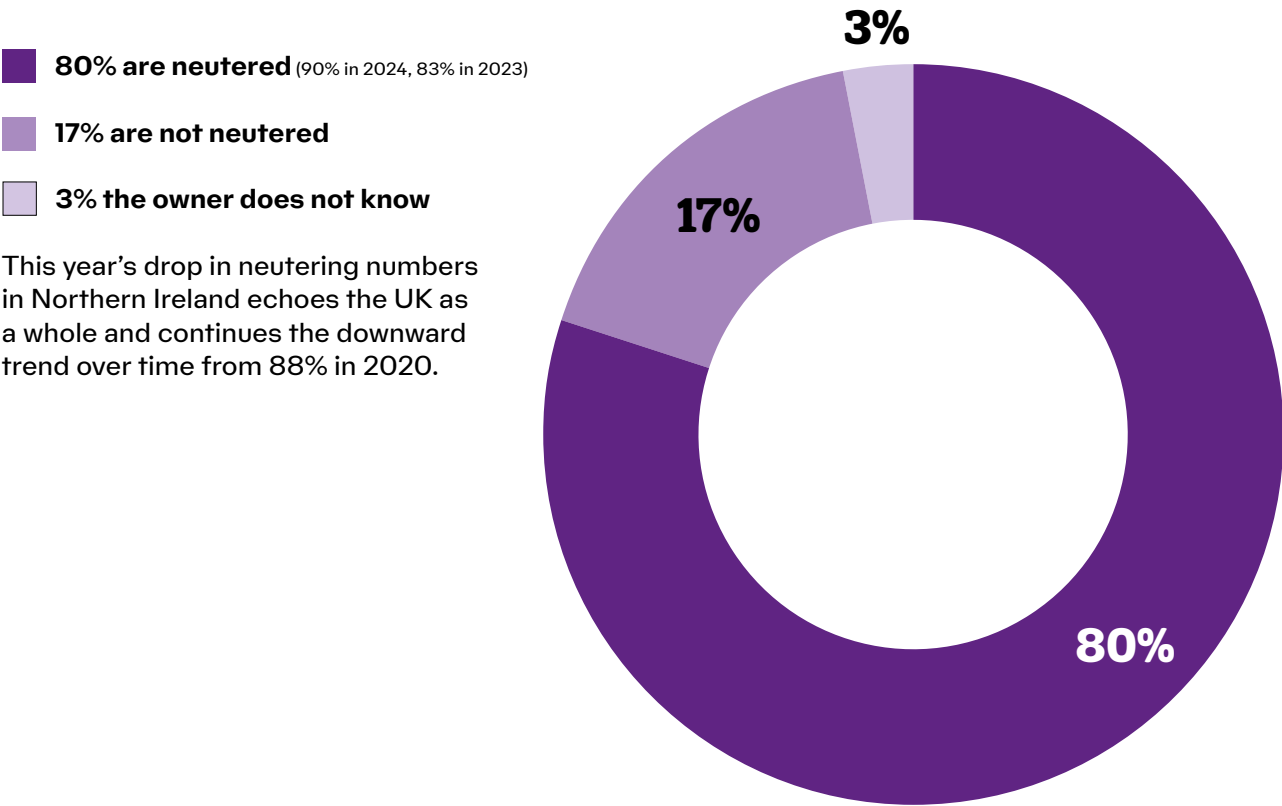


This still leaves many cats in Northern Ireland who are microchipped with details that are out of date, potentially rendering their microchip useless should they become separated from their family.



Neutering and breeding

Neutering numbers have fallen in Northern Ireland.



The cats less likely to have been neutered

Younger cat owners aged 18 to 34 are less likely to have neutered their cat (70%), compared to 84% of 35 to 54-year-olds and 92% of those aged over 55. Pedigree cats are also less likely to have been neutered (70%).

Attitudes towards neutering may also be shifting. For example, advice regarding dog neutering is now directed more towards consideration of factors relating to each individual dog (for example, breed, age, temperament, lifestyle). It could be that this is spilling over into the mindset towards cats too. In certain areas, the effects of overpopulation may not be as visible, so vets may feel they have the space to discuss the procedure as being more optional with the more affluent owners of increasingly indoor-living, pedigree cats.



When cats are being neutered

Cats can become reproductively active from the age of four months, so for cat population control to be fully effective, cats should be neutered by the time they reach this age (so-called 'pre-pubertal neutering'). 22% of owners of neutered cats in Northern Ireland report that their cat had undergone the procedure by four months old, with 92% saying their cat was neutered by one year old. This means that many cats may already have had a litter by the time they are neutered.

Evidence suggests that the timing of neutering is more important than the volume of cats neutered when it comes to population control. Maintaining a balanced cat population is one of the most effective ways to protect cat welfare*.

While some evidence suggests that vets are increasingly supportive of pre-pubertal neutering, other data suggests that this support does not always translate to increased implementation**. Cats Protection aims to publish a peer-reviewed summary of the scientific evidence regarding the age of neutering in cats, focusing on the physical and behavioural impacts. This will hopefully help reassure and motivate vets to increasingly adopt pre-pubertal neutering of cats.

“Neutering owned cats not only benefits individual cats but also supports the wider cat population. Failing to neuter cats, or delaying the procedure, has serious knock-on effects for all cats. Unowned cats on the streets and in rescue shelters continue to need our help, while neutering numbers among owned cats are sadly declining. This combination creates a significant welfare concern and places a heavy emotional burden on those caring for unwanted cats and kittens. Neutering cats at four months of age prevents early pregnancies and delivers broader population-level benefits by reducing the future suffering caused by cat overpopulation.”

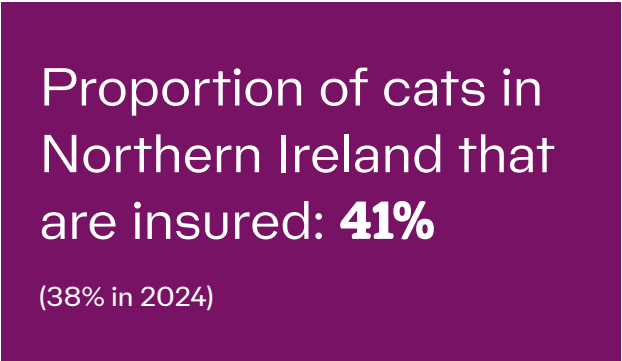
Dr Jenni McDonald, Feline Epidemiologist, Cats Protection



*McDonald J, et al. (2023) Cat: Empirical modelling of *Felis catus* population dynamics in the UK. *PLOS ONE* 18(7):e0287841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287841>

**Veterinary opinions and practices around four-month neutering: longitudinal findings from BSAVA and BVNA, Cats Protection, 2023.

Insurance, vaccination and parasite treatment



Flea treatment



Worm treatment



Insurance and vaccination numbers have increased in Northern Ireland but still lag behind the UK as a whole.

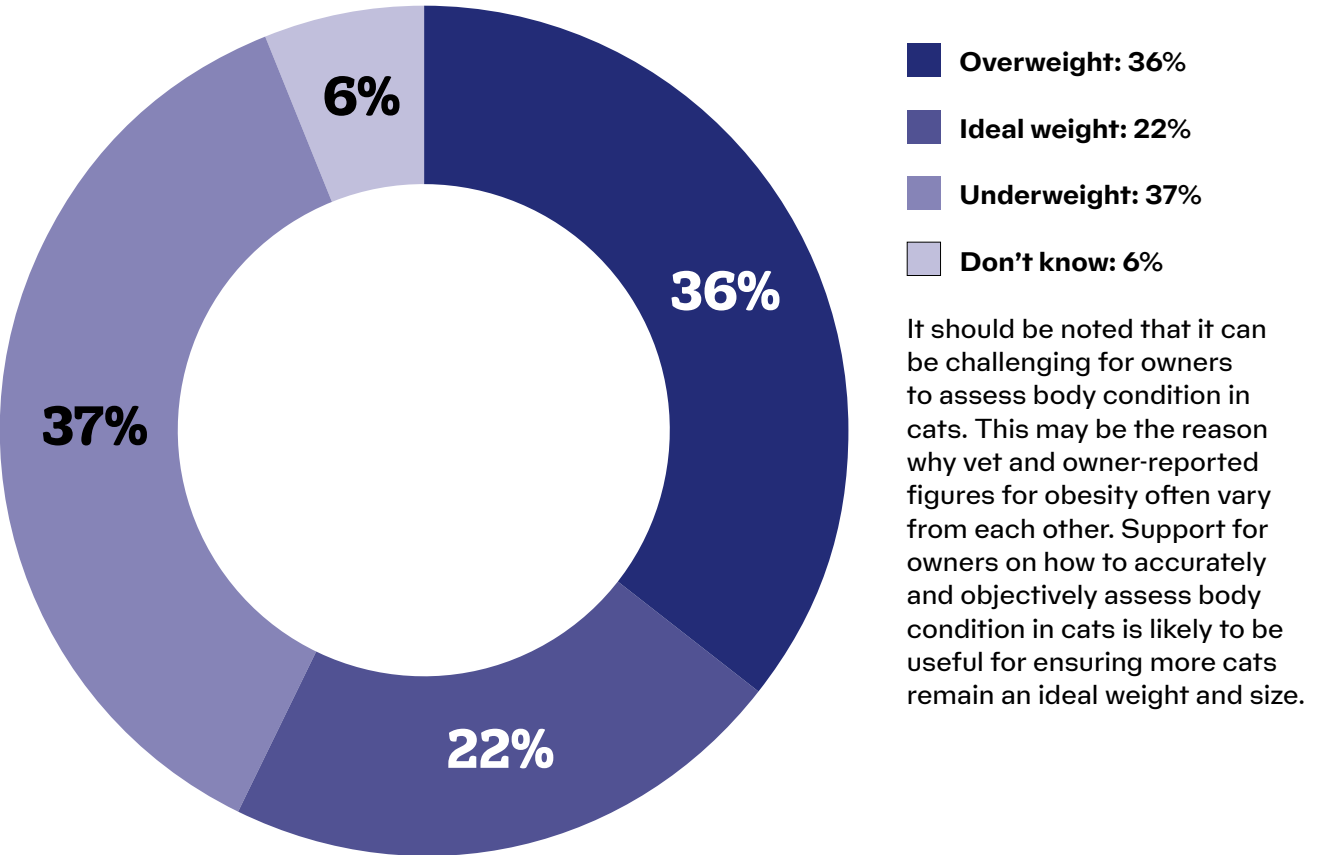
An individual cat’s risk of becoming infected with parasites is strongly linked to their lifestyle, including whether they go outdoors and their diet. Parasite treatment recommendations should therefore be evaluated on a risk-benefit basis, and vets should educate owners about the best treatment protocol. This year, the option of ‘as often as recommended by a vet’ was added to the list of response options. This is in light of recent evidence that overuse of parasiticides in pets can cause harm to the environment*. Cat owners in Northern Ireland are more likely to apply a ‘blanket treatment’ approach and treat as often as possible throughout the year, when compared to general UK data. This provides a valuable educational opportunity in Northern Ireland for vets and cat owners.

*Preston-Allen RGG., et al. (2023) Are urban areas hotspots for pollution from pet parasiticides? Grantham Institute Briefing note #15.

Health and diet

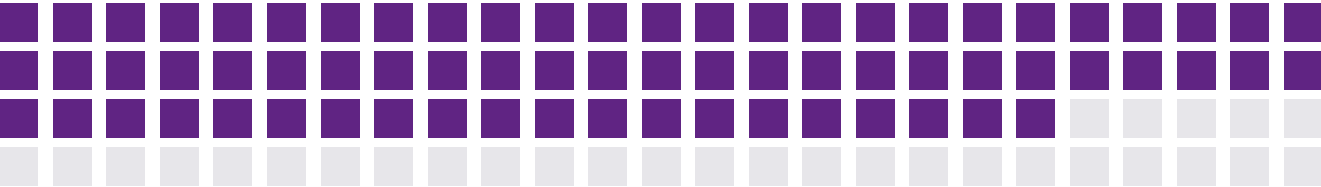
Diet and body weight

Owner perception of their cat’s weight in Northern Ireland.

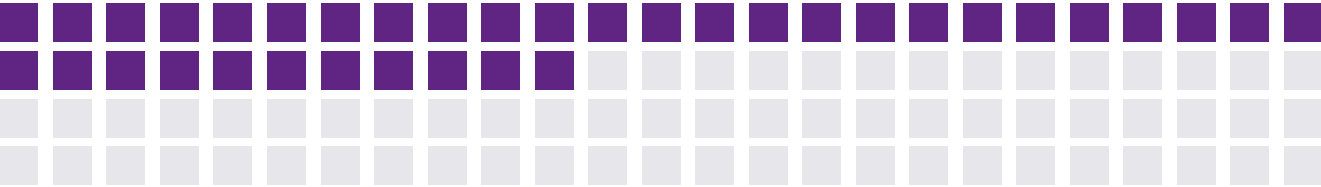


Health conditions and injury

70% of cat owners in Northern Ireland state that their cat has no diagnosed health conditions. The most commonly diagnosed conditions include parasites, arthritis, dental disease and allergic skin disease.



36% of owners in Northern Ireland said that their cat had been injured since they have owned them. The most common reason for injury is **fighting with other cats outside the household**.



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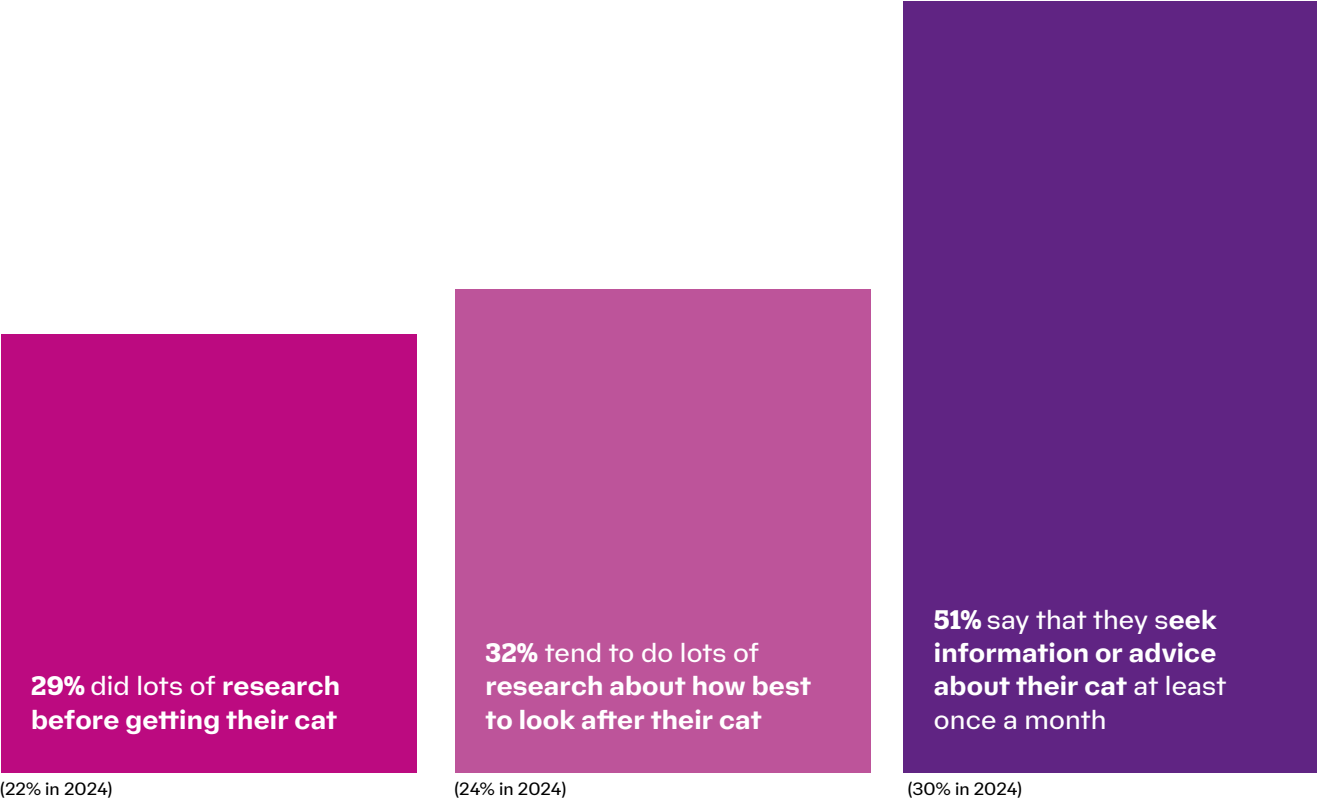
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Cat care, welfare and behaviour

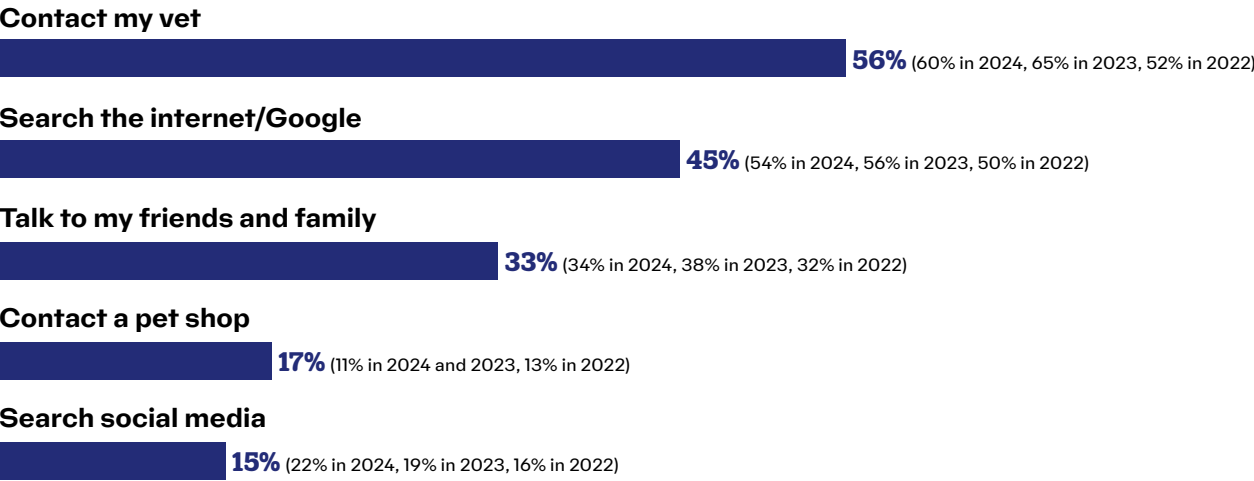
Sources of cat care information

Cat owners in Northern Ireland are increasingly researching their cats’ needs before and after acquisition.

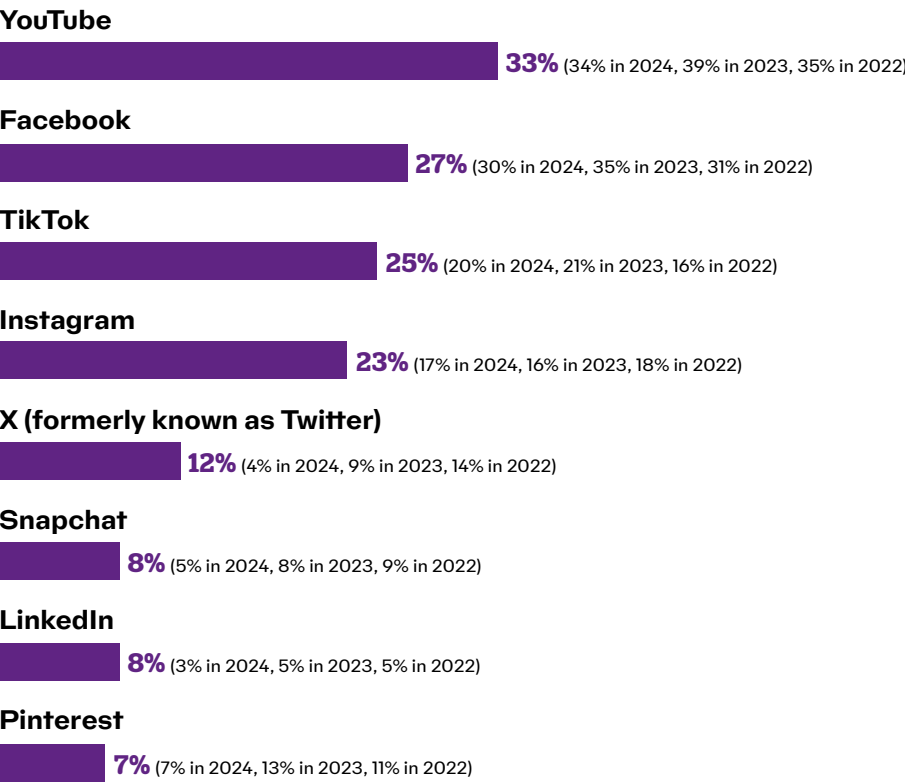


62% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they are very confident that they know what is best for their cat (56% in 2024). This confidence is felt less by male owners (54%), owners of uninsured cats (54%) and those that are not registered with a vet (45%). These groups may therefore benefit from additional support from authoritative sources.

Owners in Northern Ireland still turn to their vet first as a primary source of information about cats, but less so than in previous years.



YouTube is still the most frequently used social media platform for information about cats, however X, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn have all grown in use since the last report.



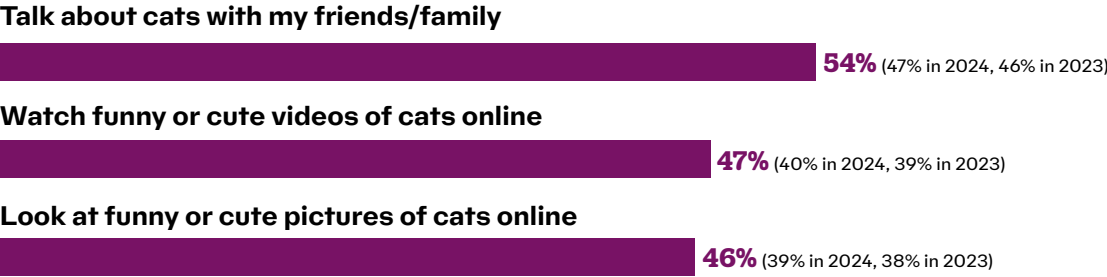
TikTok and YouTube are the most popular sources of information about cats for younger owners. This highlights the growing importance of video content as an effective way to reach cat owners.

“The digital world is increasingly playing a central role in educating, advising and influencing people of all ages. And while social media is of course filled with fun and entertaining content, younger audiences in particular are also using TikTok, YouTube and artificial intelligence tools to search for helpful, instructional and educational content about their everyday lives. Creating content, especially video content, which is borne out of our audience’s existing curiosities, needs or gaps in knowledge is helping us to not only reach more supporters and cat owners, but influence and improve cat welfare at a huge scale.”

Vicki Greenfield, Digital Engagement Manager, Cats Protection



Top three cat-related activities that owners engage in several times a week or more.



Cat content is increasingly enjoyed by cat owners in Northern Ireland online, with **83%** saying that they enjoy cute or funny cat-related content online at least once a month.

Overall, Facebook and TikTok are the most popular sources of ‘fun’ cat-related content (41% and 38% respectively). For younger owners aged 18 to 24 though, Facebook is much less popular (22%), with TikTok being significantly favoured (77%). Instagram is the second favourite platform for such content in this younger group (47%, all cat owners in Northern Ireland: 31%).

“While the internet is full of sweet and funny cat videos, there is sadly a dark side to online cat content. Some viral ‘trends’ we’ve seen can depict cat owners unknowingly causing their cats harm or distress. We’ve also seen content that contains misinformation about cats, which could lead to poor welfare. At the more extreme end, videos containing cat abuse have appeared on multiple social media platforms. In order to help combat this, Cats Protection is a member of Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition (SMACC). SMACC is a coalition designed to end the proliferation of animal cruelty content on social media by collaborating with the platforms to end the availability, spread and profitability of this content.

“If you come across any cat cruelty content online, make sure to follow SMACC’s ‘five steps to stop online cruelty’: be aware of what is cruel, do not watch, do not engage, do not share, and report to the platform.”

Jade Emery-Temprano, Advocacy & Campaigns Officer, Cats Protection



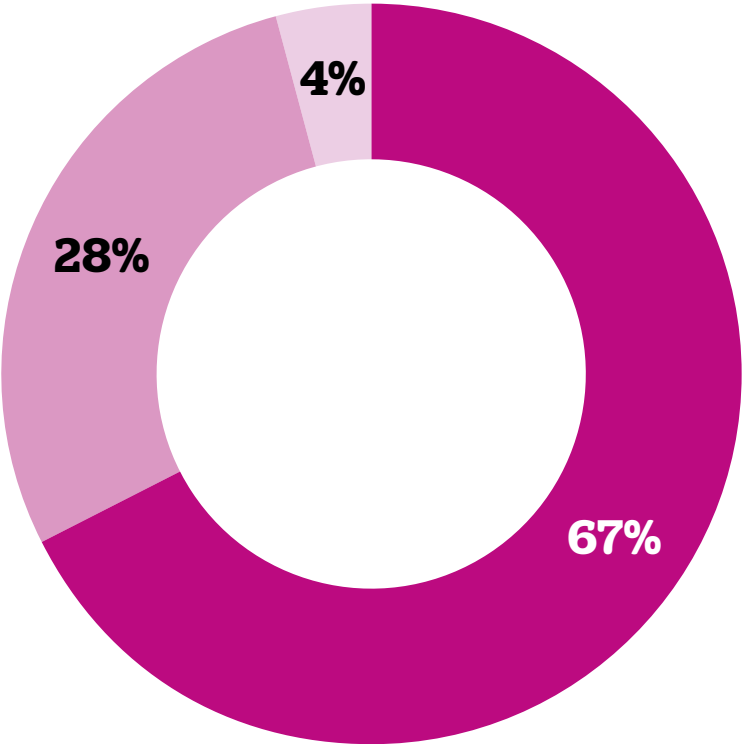
A cat’s environment

Indoor versus outdoor cats

Most cats in Northern Ireland have outdoor access.



Northern Ireland has the lowest rate of indoor-only cats of all the UK nations.

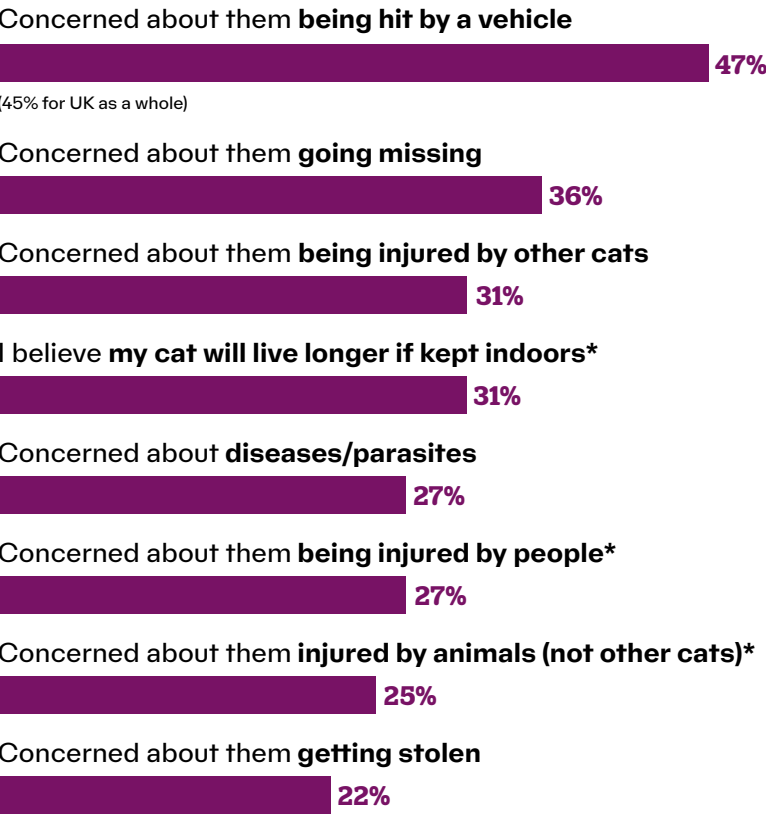


“Providing enrichment is essential for all cats, regardless of breed, to support their physical and behavioural wellbeing. This is especially important for indoor-only cats, who have fewer opportunities to express natural behaviours like hunting, climbing and exploring. Pedigree cats have the same innate needs as moggies, and we can help to meet these needs by adding extra enrichment through activities such as interactive play sessions, puzzle feeding and training. We may even want to ‘bring the outside in’ by adding novel objects to their environment for them to explore, such as a cardboard box filled with a collection of items from outside, like feathers and cat-safe leaves and twigs.”

Sammie Ravenscroft, Regional Community Behaviourist, Cats Protection



Owner concern over harm or disappearance keeps cats in Northern Ireland indoors.



New response options included for this question this year helped further define just how worried owners in Northern Ireland are about their cat coming to harm if they are allowed outdoor access. The fact that the activities of people are perceived as a very real threat highlights the importance of educating all members of society about protecting feline welfare, not just those who own and care for cats. Extending length of life was a common reason to keep a cat indoors, yet pedigree cats are more likely to be kept indoors exclusively and have been shown to have shorter average lifespans than moggies**.

Although there isn’t a definite trend for cats to be increasingly kept indoors, pedigree cats are increasingly popular, and they are more likely to be kept exclusively indoors. If trends in pedigree cat ownership continue, we may well see increasing numbers of cats kept exclusively indoors in the future. It’s not always easy to provide for a cat’s essential needs when they live an indoor-only lifestyle, and so owners will likely benefit from support here.

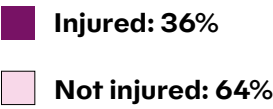
*New response option for 2025.

**Mata F. 2025. Life expectancy of cats in Britain: moggies and molllies live longer. *PeerJ* 13:e18869 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.18869>



Preventing harm to cats

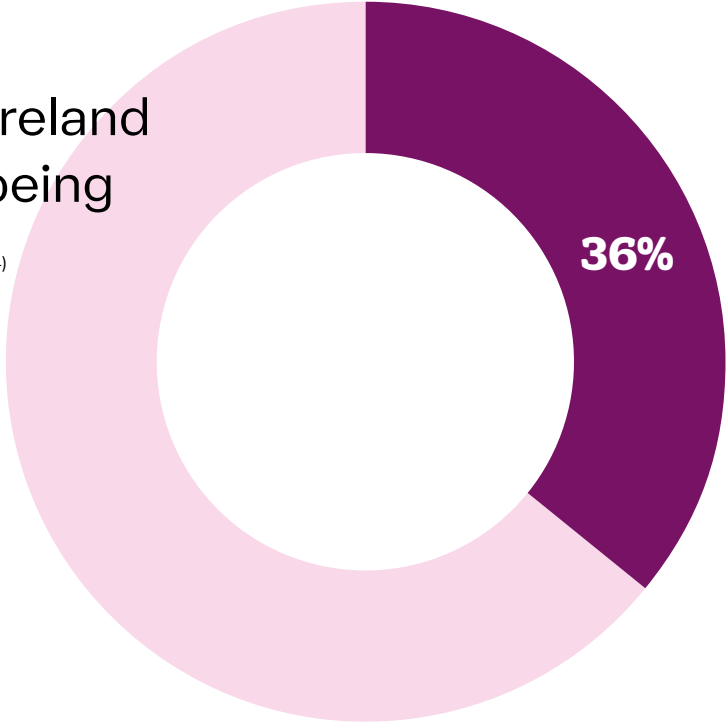
36% of cats in Northern Ireland have been injured since being in their owner’s care (28% in 2024)



Cat fights remain the most common cause of injury: **20%.**

11% were involved in a fight with another animal

6% were involved in a road traffic accident



Cats do not interact and socialise the same way that some other pet species (such as dogs) do. It is therefore important for owners to understand feline behaviour and do what they can to prevent situations that may lead to conflict between cats. This is especially true for multi-cat households: 6% of cats in Northern Ireland who got injured did so because of fighting with cats from their own household.

Awareness of lily toxicity among cat owners in Northern Ireland: **52%**

(51% in 2024)

Lily toxicity occurs when a cat eats any part of the lily plant, including pollen that ends up on their coat and the cat licks off while grooming. The toxins can cause kidney failure and, in some cases, prove deadly. Ideally, owners should totally prevent their cat from accessing lilies, but if lily toxicity should occur, veterinary care should be sought immediately, as fast treatment can prevent kidney failure. To increase public awareness, Cats Protection continues to work with relevant organisations across the flower and retail sector to improve the labelling of lilies and other toxic plants.



Cats out and about

The use of accessories to take cats out is increasingly popular in Northern Ireland.

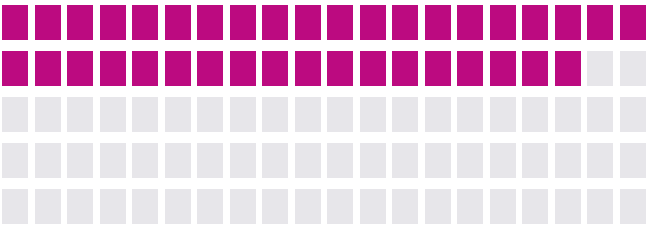


Cats are a territorial species and prefer to be allowed to choose how they roam, rather than planned leisure outings or excursions away from their familiar home. 42% of cats in Northern Ireland that have both indoor and outdoor access do so in an unrestricted way (similar to the UK as a whole: 41%). New response options this year gave further insight into the specifics of cats in Northern Ireland that have outdoor access. 39% have outdoor access during the day, but are kept in overnight, 12% are allowed outdoor access into an outdoor enclosure, and 6% only go outdoors on a lead and harness.

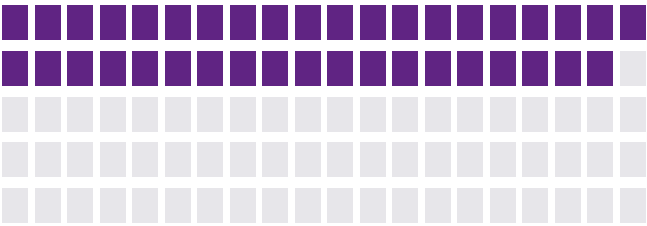
When a cat does need transporting (for example, for a vet visit), a safe and sturdy cat carrier that is easy to clean should be used. Cat backpacks are often not big enough to allow a cat to sit or stand comfortably, and viewing windows tend to increase stress for cats*. Harnesses can be uncomfortable for cats or allow escape. Most importantly, they prevent the flight response and feeling trapped can significantly escalate stress in cats.

Cats and other members of the household

38% of cat owners in Northern Ireland have children (aged under 18 years old) living at home.



39% of cat owners in Northern Ireland also share their homes with a dog.



Normal social interaction is very different for cats than for humans and dogs, so to maintain a harmonious multi-inhabitant household, it is important that a cat’s needs are always considered. This protects not only the cat’s welfare, but other household members too. In a recent survey, nearly three quarters of children shared that they had experienced some sort of negative interaction with a pet*. Cats usually only show signs of aggression if very stressed, so it is important to teach young children how to interact with pets safely, be able to recognise early signs of stress and respect their pet’s boundaries.

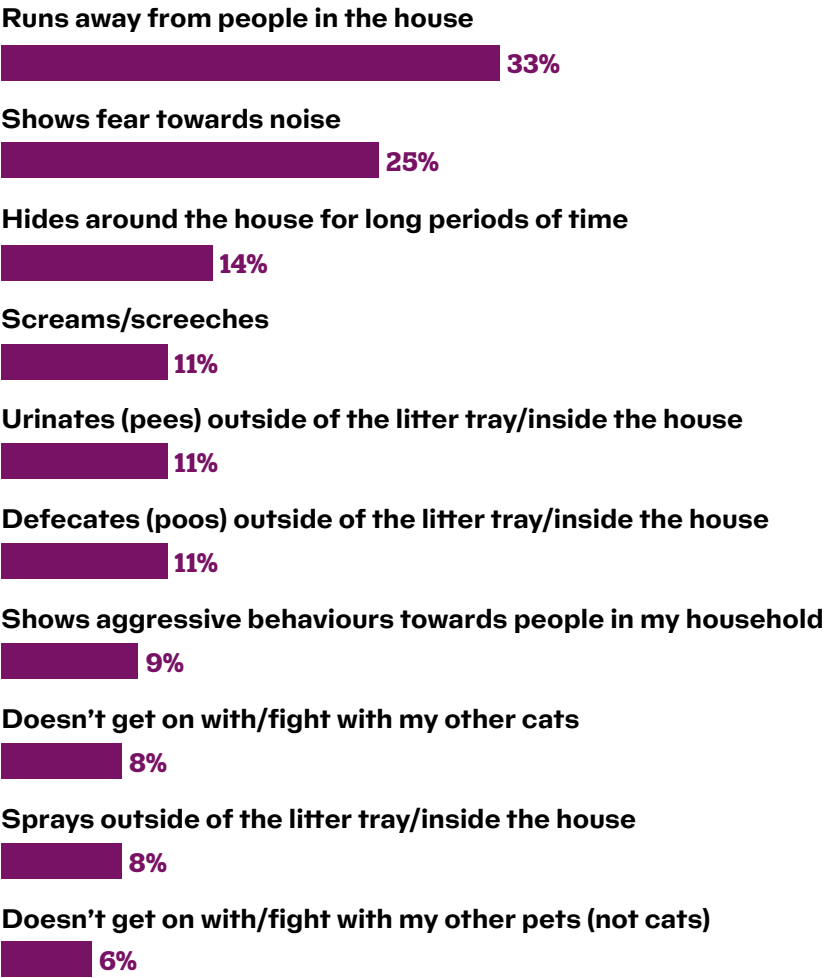
It is important for the rehoming sector to acknowledge that in many households, cats share their home with a dog. With pets that have compatible temperaments and appropriate management, these multi-pet households can happily satisfy each pet’s individual needs. If each case is approached individually and with careful thought, blanket ‘no dog’ or ‘no children’ policies for rehoming cats may not be necessary, and more cats will be able to find suitable homes.

*cats.org.uk/cats-blog/what-type-of-carrier-is-best-for-my-cat

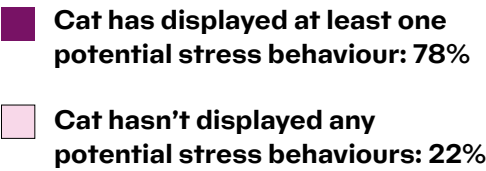
**Pet Education Partnership (PEP) Children & Pets Survey 2025, UK.

Behaviour and stress

Many cats in Northern Ireland have shown potential signs of stress in the last 12 months.



78% of cats in Northern Ireland have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months.



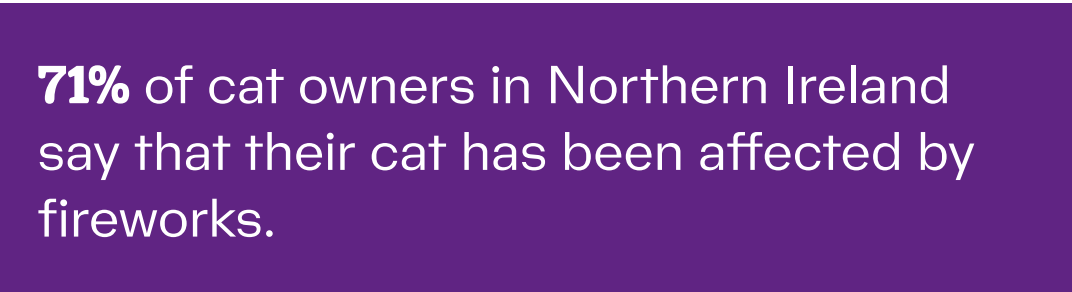
Many behaviours that owners may find a nuisance are completely normal for cats. This includes behaviours such as scratching around the house, which is performed by cats to keep their claws in good condition, relieve stress and scent mark. Cats also like to move vertically within their environment, so jumping onto elevated surfaces is again an instinctual, normal behaviour. Providing resources such as cat towers, cat shelves and scratching posts can help cats to express these normal behaviours in a way that keeps everyone in the household happy.

Analysing cat behaviour is further complicated by the fact that working out the cause of a specific behaviour can sometimes be difficult. For example, toileting accidents could indicate a urinary tract infection or digestive upset, osteoarthritis or be a sign of stress. This is why any change to a cat's behaviour should be investigated by a vet.

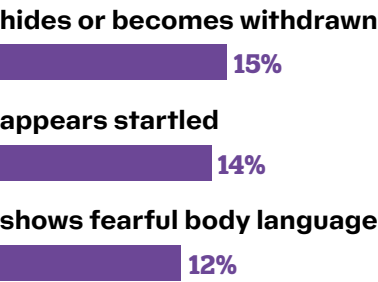
Cats often show signs of stress much earlier than owners recognise however, so it is important that owners are educated on what to look out for, as well as how to avoid stressful situations for their cat in the first place. Ultimately, this is in everyone's best interest as resultant 'behavioural problems' can negatively affect the human-animal bond, even leading to some owners choosing to rehome their cat as a result.

Fireworks

Fireworks can be really distressing for all animals, including cats.



Fireworks continue to negatively impact cats in Northern Ireland. Top three behaviours:



Companionship

The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat.

As company for me/my family



I've always had cats



I grew up with cats and so wanted to get my own when I left home



To help me feel less lonely



They needed looking after/to be taken in



To help me feel less stressed/anxious



I wanted a pet animal and thought having a cat would be easier than having a dog



I've just always wanted cats, so got one as soon as I could



My child/children wanted one



My partner wanted one/already had one



Once again, companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that people in Northern Ireland choose to own a cat (55%. 49% in 2024, 55% in 2023).

90% of cat owners in Northern Ireland agreed that they consider their cat part of the family, clearly demonstrating their important position within the household.

Cat ownership is a hugely important part of people’s lives and wellbeing.

I spend time stroking my cat at least once a day



Having a cat brings me joy



I often talk to my cat



Having a cat has a positive impact on my wellbeing



I hate leaving my cat when I go away



I love spoiling my cat



My cat gives me a reason to get up in the morning



I think about my cat a lot when I'm not with them



I talk about my cat a lot



I put my cat's needs before my own



Since 2020, there has been a significant rise in the number of Northern Irish owners who say that they think and talk about their cat a lot. Simply by being more vocal, these owners may well have a greater potential to influence other owners, so they are an important group to target with appropriate educational messaging.



“The overall charm of cats is highly attractive.”

Female owner in Northern Ireland, age 35 to 44



Support from Cats Protection

Recognising the importance of cats to their owners and wider society, Cats Protection works hard to support cat owners, especially during particularly challenging times.

This is achieved through various organised initiatives, educational campaigns and political lobbying. To make sure that the support on offer is as effective as possible, Cats Protection maintains a constant focus on the true needs of cats and their owners. This is largely achieved by collecting and analysing information from a variety of data sources, including the annual *CATS Report*.

Our Northern Ireland Cat Centre is dedicated to improving the lives of cats and kittens. They work to find new homes for local cats in their care, offer support with neutering, assist with lost and found cats, as well as promote general education and awareness on cat-related topics throughout Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Cat Centre can be contacted via cats.org.uk/belfast or on 02890 480 202.

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Teaching others to make the world better for cats

Education is a core focus for Cats Protection with provisions including in-person and online talks, reliable and accessible online information and topic-led multi-media campaigns. Through our delivery in schools, colleges and targeted digital campaigns, a particular focus on young people helps make sure that owners of the future are well informed about meeting the needs of cats, with the aim of creating lasting positive improvements to cat welfare.

Cats Protection is also proud to be part of the Pet Education Partnership (PEP), a collaborative initiative between the UK’s leading animal welfare organisations, alongside PDSA, RSPCA, Blue Cross, Dogs Trust, Woodgreen, USPCA and SSPCA. Our shared vision is to make animal welfare education accessible to every child aged between five and 11 in the UK, with the ultimate goal of incorporating it into the curriculum.

Find out more at cats.org.uk/education

Ensuring a lifetime of care

Who will take care of my cat after I have gone? It’s a concern that many older owners/prospective owners have. Cat Guardians was set up by Cats Protection to provide peace of mind here. By making sure that a cat’s individual needs are known, this service assures care for a cat after their owner is gone, first in Cats Protection care and then in a new loving home that is perfectly matched to them. It is hoped that by providing this reassurance, people feel more comfortable welcoming a cat into their life during their later years.

In 2024, Cat Guardians cared for and rehomed 202 cats whose owners had passed away, helping 158 supporters.

Find out more about Cat Guardians at cats.org.uk/catguardians

Supporting owners through loss

The Paws to Listen grief support service was established to help owners who face one of the most challenging aspects of cat ownership: losing their cat. This free and confidential service puts grieving owners in contact with trained volunteer listeners who are ready to offer emotional support and practical information for owners whose cats have passed away, gone missing or are separated for other reasons such as rehoming.

In 2024, our Paws to Listen grief support service received 1,610 calls and emails.

Find out more about Paws to Listen at cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen

“At Cats Protection we understand the strength of the bond between people and their cats. We know that losing a beloved cat, whatever the circumstances, can be incredibly painful. Sadly, this type of grief isn’t always recognised or understood by society. That’s why our Paws to Listen volunteers are here to provide support and understanding, so no one has to cope with their loss alone.”

Catherine Joyce, Paws to Listen Team Leader, Cats Protection



Campaigning to improve the lives of cats

We will always drive for change that better protects the health and welfare of cats and their owners. Whether it’s helping support cat ownership by encouraging landlords to stop applying blanket ‘no pet’ policies or calling for regulation of cat breeding, when important legislative conversations are happening, we are the voice for cats.

Find out more about our campaigns at cats.org.uk/campaigning

Cats in summary

State of the nation

- Cat ownership:

	In millions		% of cat-owning households	
	2024	2025	2024	2025
Total UK	10.6	10.2	25%	24%
England	9.0	8.5	25%	24%
Wales	0.5	0.5	24%	24%
Scotland	0.8	0.7	22%	20%
Northern Ireland	0.2	0.2	21%	22%

- There are 250,000 owned cats in Northern Ireland
- 67% of households in Northern Ireland own one cat, 32% own two or more cats
- Those under 35 years old are more likely to have recently acquired a cat

The cat market

- The proportion of pedigrees in the cat population in Northern Ireland has increased since last year

	Total pet cat population in Northern Ireland	Total pet cat population in Northern Ireland in 2024	Cats acquired in the last 12 months in Northern Ireland
Moggy/ domestic shorthair or longhair	52%	75%	32%
Pedigree/ purebred	30%	15%	42%
Cross-breed (non-moggy)	11%	7%	10%
Don't know	7%	3%	15%

- 30% of cats in Northern Ireland were ‘bought’, continuing this increasing trend (15% in 2024, 14% in 2023 and 2022)
 - Still lower than the UK as a whole (38%)

Veterinary care

- 30% of cat owners in Northern Ireland say that they have experienced difficulty accessing a vet
- 14% of cats in Northern Ireland are not registered with a vet
- 66% of owners in Northern Ireland say that they do not visit the vet as often as they would like
- Neutering numbers have fallen in Northern Ireland to 80%, continuing a downward trend from 88% in 2020. 42,500 cats in Northern Ireland (17%) are not neutered
- Microchipping numbers have dropped in Northern Ireland to 60% (64% in 2024, 67% in 2023)
- The proportion of insured cats in Northern Ireland has increased to 41%
- The proportion of cats that are up to date with vaccinations in Northern Ireland has risen to 71%

Cat care, welfare and behaviour

- Cat owners in Northern Ireland are increasingly researching their cats’ needs both before and after acquisition:
 - 29% did lots of research before getting their cat: (22% in 2024)
 - 32% tend to do lots of research about how best to look after their cat: (24% in 2024)
 - 51% say that they seek information or advice about their cat at least once a month (30% in 2024)

- Most cats in Northern Ireland have outdoor access; 28% always stay indoors
- The use of accessories to take cats out is increasingly popular in Northern Ireland:
 - cat harness: 14% (7% in 2024)
 - cat backpack: 14% (1% in 2024)
- 78% of cats in Northern Ireland have displayed at least one potential stress behaviour in the last 12 months

Companionship

- The wellbeing benefits of cat ownership are still a strong motivator for having a cat; companionship, reducing loneliness and reducing stress are collectively the top reasons that people in Northern Ireland choose to own a cat (55%)
- 90% of cat owners in Northern Ireland agreed that they consider their cat part of the family, clearly demonstrating their important position within the household

Where do we go from here?

A message from John May, Chief Executive, Cats Protection

Now in its sixth year, the *CATS Report* continues to shed light on the evolving world of cats and the people who care for them. It offers vital insight for the animal welfare sector, veterinary profession and government, helping us all understand how best to protect and promote feline welfare in a fast-moving landscape.

A key trend is the rise of a younger, often more affluent, generation of cat owners. They care deeply about their pets and are keen to do the right thing. Many turn first to social media for advice, and they're more likely to buy a cat than adopt one, often with a preference for pedigree breeds, including those with known health concerns.

This presents both opportunities and challenges. It's encouraging to see strong emotional investment in cats, and we welcome any owner wanting to do their best. But cats are not small dogs. They have unique behaviours, needs and instincts. From litter trays to territory, companionship to independence, responsible ownership starts with understanding what it truly means to see the world through cats' eyes.

Education is therefore more important than ever. We want to help the whole of the UK public, whether they own a cat, feed a stray, or come across a feral, to understand the needs of all cats. Owned cats, community cats, strays and ferals each require different approaches, but all deserve respect, care and protection. A truly cat-literate nation is one where every feline's welfare is better understood and better safeguarded.

We cannot accomplish this alone. The government plays a key role in helping to shape behaviour change and safeguarding the welfare of cats and kittens in Northern Ireland.

Cats Protection welcomes the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' ambitious Animal Welfare Pathway. We will continue to work with the government to make a better life for cats through proposals like banning the third-party sale of kittens, considering mandatory microchipping of cats, and regulating rescue and rehoming organisations.

Using social media more effectively, sharing engaging and informative video content, and telling each cat's unique story in a way that resonates will help us reach today's audiences. Our aim remains the same: to find the right home for every cat, no matter their background.

At Cats Protection, we're responding. We're reviewing how we communicate, expanding our educational work and calling for better regulation of cat breeding. With evidence, compassion and nearly 100 years of experience, we're ensuring our voice is heard.

A healthy, balanced cat population will take shared commitment. We are committed to working alongside others across the sector, bringing together our insights, our advocacy, and our care for cats to build a better future for them all.

Whatever stage someone is at in their journey with cats, we're here to help. Because life really is better with cats.

John May CVO OBE DL, Chief Executive, Cats Protection



Services

General advice and rehoming cats. A helpline for those with any questions regarding their own cats, or cats in general, and for those looking to adopt a cat or to have theirs rehomed.

cats.org.uk/contact-us or 03000 12 12 12

Neutering support. Providing thousands of people each year with financial assistance for neutering.

cats.org.uk/neutering

Education talks. Free talks to schools (curriculum-based) and community groups, advising both adults and children about cat behaviour and responsible pet ownership.

cats.org.uk/education

Cat Guardians. A free service aimed at giving peace of mind to cat owners who are concerned about what might happen if they were to pass away before their cat.

cats.org.uk/catguardians or 01825 741 291

Paws to Listen. A free grief support service run by trained volunteer listeners, for those dealing with the loss of their cat whether through death, going missing or separation.

cats.org.uk/paws-to-listen or 0800 024 9494

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Making a better life for cats, because life is better with cats



For further information contact stats@cats.org.uk or visit cats.org.uk/stats

Cats Protection is a registered charity 203644 (England and Wales), SC037711 (Scotland) and is listed as a Section 167 institution by the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland.
Registered office: National Cat Centre, Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, Sussex, RH17 7TT

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